

THE COLONNADE

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Global symposium localizes health

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Last year, plans began to take shape for this year's Fifth Annual Georgia College Global Citizenship Symposium. With the freshman convocation book for this year being Barbara Kingsolver's "Animal, Vegetable, Miracle," it was an easy decision to make the theme for the symposium "Personal and Global Health: My role. Our challenges."

Co-sponsored by the American Democracy Project, Green Fee Committee, International Education Center, academic departments and student/faculty organizations, the symposium ran Feb. 6-8, with most of the events, including several panel discussions and documentary screenings, held in Magnolia Ballroom.

Monday's events served as an introduction to personal and global health and consisted of a showing of the documentary "Sick Around the World." The film depicted capitalist democracies, how they deliver health care and what the United States could learn from them.

Following the film was a fact-filled panel discussion responding to "Sick Around the World." The panelists included GC faculty from Community Health and Human Services, Nursing, Economics and guest panelist David Bennett, associate Dean from Wellstar College of Health & Human Services at Kennesaw State University.

Community Health Professor Heidi Fowler was one of the many panelists present, and she had a lot to say in response to health care and the U.S.

"The longer the U.S. delays implementation of true health care reform, the more expensive it will become," Fowler said. "Our country is challenged by providing access to care. This will remain a challenge until we demand the right to basic health care just as we demand the right to an education and the right to a fair and speedy trial, should we find ourselves in need."

An entertainment factor was added to both Monday and Tuesday to break up the panel discussions and keynote speakers. The Firehouse Theatre of London Performance was featured Monday afternoon, and the play "Gruesome Playground Injuries" occurred Tuesday Afternoon, both of which had a good turnout.

Food and agriculture was the overall theme for Tuesday, with events such as a showing of the documentary "Food, Inc.," a free lunch comprised of all locally grown food and various breakout sessions about sustainability.

The day opened with another panel discussion, this time with a mix of farmers and agriculture enthusiasts. GC students, faculty and Baldwin County residents were present to ask questions as well as talk about things like why is important for kids to be introduced to gardening and what should be done about food deserts, places where fresh fruits and vegetables are not readily available.

During lunch, Danielle Nierenberg, Project Director of the Nourishing the Planet project for the Worldwatch Institute in Washington, D.C, along with other Georgia farmers, brought to light issues that some people may not be aware of.

Debbie Harshbarger, Community Garden Association Board Outreach chair, spoke about food waste and how pressing of an issue it really is.

“Food waste is a big issue. Twenty percent to 50 percent of food is wasted before it reaches people’s stomachs,” Harshbarger said. “The good news is that we can all manage this by buying less, donating food that we don’t need and preserving food.”

The final event of the night was without a doubt the most anticipated. With Magnolia Ballroom filled to the brim with students, faculty and Baldwin County residents, the keynote speaker took the stage. A year ago during the planning of the symposium, it was decided by the Green Fee Committee that Joel Salatin would be the optimum person to have as the keynote speaker. Salatin, who was featured in Food, Inc., is the face of Polyface Farms and was deemed the “most influential farmer in North America” by TIME Magazine. Accounting professor Cynthia Orms is responsible for bringing the “high-priest of pasture” to GC.

Salatin, who was introduced as a “lunatic farmer,” lived up to this title as soon as his first line was uttered. He spoke of the major difference between today’s generation and past generations and the cultural ideology of younger people.

“We are a guinea pig culture,” Salatin said. “We’re the first culture who routinely eats food we can’t pronounce. We’re the first culture where the average morsel travels 1500 miles and we’re the first culture that eats food that won’t rot. If you can squeeze cheese out of a bottle, that ain’t normal.”

Salatin, who suggested that GC change from a formidable campus to an edible campus, discussed the importance of soil by gallivanting around stage and making various, strange sound effects to explain the different organisms that live within soil. He stated that the “visible world is dependent on that invisible world.”

Today, people continuously make excuses about why they cannot buy the kind of food that their body really needs. According to Salatin, no culture before this one has spent such a small amount of their income on food. If people can buy flat-screen televisions and box after box of Domino’s pizza, then they can afford healthy food.

“We are far more concerned with the purity of the gas we are putting in our Honda than the purity of food we’re putting in our bodies,” Salatin said.

Ending with a standing ovation, Salatin’s passionate speech was well received, but the amount of students present was not what was expected. Ellen Gaither, sophomore liberal studies major and co-chair of the Green Fee Committee, wished that more students had attended the day’s events and were more passionate about agriculture.

“I really wish more students would have come,” Gaither said. “They could have looked up the speakers and realized how important they really are.”

Wednesday marked the end of the symposium and focused more on finding jobs within organizations like the Center for Disease Control, the Peace Corps and AID Atlanta. Most of the organizations required a bachelor’s degree, if not a master’s degree, and experience within the career desired but getting involved in internships was stressed.

“Go get an internship,” Ariana Youmans, case manager for Fulton County jail, said. “I beat out people with master’s degrees because of my experience. I was really dedicated and passionate about it.”

Even though it was emphasized that working with the CDC usually requires a master’s degree, they do offer a fellowship called the Public Health Associate Program that provides its recipients the chance to work with a mentor for two years, and it is available to undergraduate students with either little experience in public health or a lot of experience. The position is paid and can eventually lead to a higher position as a public health advisor.

“After two years, you can be given a position as a public health advisor and do anything from run programs and events to jump out of helicopters in Africa or interview someone after an outbreak,” said Laura Eloyan, Global Health Recruitment Specialist for the CDC.

Presented with three days of issues related to personal and global health, locals who took part may be inspired to change their lives for the better.

“I hope people, students especially, begin to recognize there is a much greater world beyond them,” Gaither said. “It’s something as simple as growing our own food and appreciating all the world has to give us.”